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SOVIET NAVAL CONSTRUCTION AIM: PRESENCE ON ALL OCEANS (SOVIETIS--ETC(U))

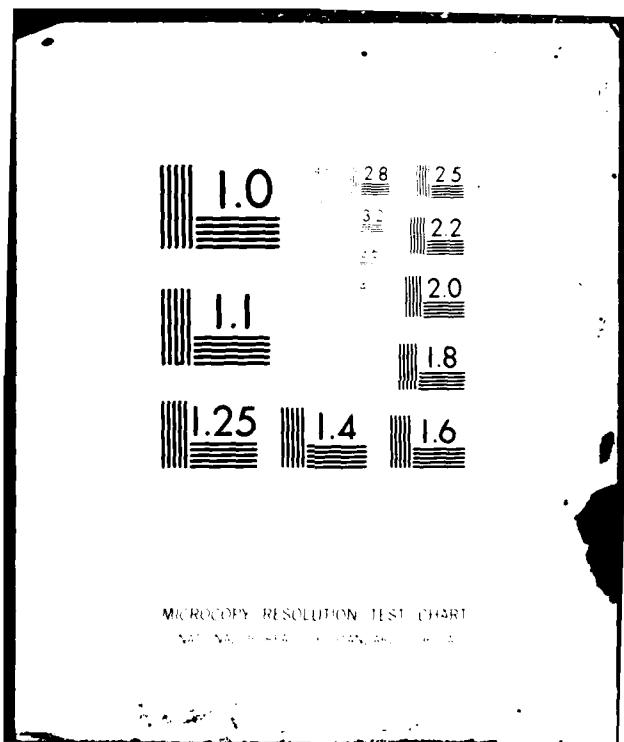
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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
NAVAL INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT CENTER
4301 Suitland Road
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Aim: Presence on all Oceans

Sowjetischer Flottenbau; Zielrichtung: Praesenz auf Allen Weltmeeren

AUTHOR(S) AND/OR EDITOR(S): S. Breyer

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SOVIET NAVAL CONSTRUCTION
AIM: PRESENCE ON ALL OCEANS

/ Breyer, S., Sowjetischer Flottenbau; Zielrichtung: Praesenz auf Allen Weltmeeren, Soldat und Technik, No. 1., 1982, pp. 24-27, German /

When the Second World War had come to an end in 1945, the Soviet Navy stood to a certain extent in the shadow of the victorious Red Army, which, with the help of its Western Allies, had reached the high point of its display of power and ruled most of the Eurasian land mass, from the shores of the Pacific in the Far East to the Elbe in the heart of Germany. The Soviet Navy had not been permitted to make decisive contributions to the war; in general, its activities from 1941 to 1945 were limited to often highly successful support operations on the "wet flanks" of Army units, as well as in the employment of light forces, such as torpedo boats. /24*

In the North Sea, the Soviet naval command could directly witness the achievements of which the "classical" sea powers, Great Britain and the U.S., were capable, and what naval warfare really means; the leadership learned this lesson as the Allies went about the supply of war materials in the largest, still unacknowledged quantities, making possible Soviet resistance against the German assault.

Further, it was also clear to the Soviets how their Anglo-Saxon Allies succeeded, in the last two years of the war, in bringing up entire armies by sea over thousands of kilometers, in Europe as well as in the Pacific; landing them in a veritable inferno of fire support on still well-defended coasts and then supplying them to such an extent that they were successful in penetrating deep into enemy territory, finally defeating the enemy.

The end of the Second World War brought the breakdown of the alliance, in the face of the Soviet expansion policy, and with it the East-West conflict, the "Cold War" and the division of the world. In this epoch, the Soviet Union had to immediately be very concerned to secure her power-political and territorial right of possession, before she could extend herself further. Although the West--namely the U.S. and Great Britain--rigorously reduced its military forces almost immediately after the end of hostilities, and discarded and scrapped much by then surplus war material, the Soviet leadership--at that time still led by Stalin--possibly believed that it had to deal with the danger of a Western intervention. In any case, they were aware of the weakness of their Navy, for in view of its inadequate level of armament it could not be anticipated that it could successfully repel intervention or support military-political activities.

As a result of this perception, the program for construction of a blue-water fleet appears to have been abandoned. This program had already been approved before war's end, and would have been realized after reconstruction of the shipyards and ancillary industries, and then only over a long period of time. In its place, a construction plan appeared which gave consideration to a concept motivated by a concern for defense against amphibious operations. This plan--often referred to as the "anti-amphibious" plan in the Western literature--called for a fleet which was no less strong, and would meet a threat on three defensive lines: on the most advanced line, submarines, assigned to inflict losses on the enemy in

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his advance; thereafter, as the next line of defense, extensive minefields on the one hand and the employment of strong land-based naval air units on the other. Finally, cruiser/destroyer battle groups (and torpedo patrol boats in the immediate coastal waters) as the third and last line, assigned the task of overcoming surviving amphibious units with guns and torpedoes.

Within a period extending into the mid-60s, approximately 40 cruisers, more than 200 destroyers, and more than 1100 submarines were to be built. Measured against the capabilities of the nation, still for the most part bleeding from many wounds, this was a truly gigantic program, the realization of which would only become possible through callous neglect of many other necessities. It began, after shipbuilding capacity and industry had been half rebuilt, around the end of the '40s.

Shortly after the beginning of the '50s, the first new warship classes were sighted: first the SKORYY-Class destroyers and the WHISKEY-Class submarines, and shortly thereafter the SVEROLOV cruiser. But years elasped before this intensive Soviet naval buildup was recognized in its full range of variation in the Western world. But the only grounds for concern were the numbers of units produced: qualitatively, the new classes did not represent anything particularly impressive, for they corresponded technologically to a standard which comparable constructions in the Western navies had long since left behind. To be sure, the new Soviet constructions added, to a gradually increasing degree, to the technology of that contingent of ships--primarily of German origin--which had been taken over as a share of the war booty, but this did not appear alarming to Western eyes in those years. More attention was aroused by the new Soviet submarine constructions, for which the German developments of the last war years had obviously served as a godfather. The German submarines developed at that time had been able to prove in the last days of the war that they were capable of enlivening, even revolutionizing submarine warfare, which had come to a complete standstill. These possibilities were immediately recognized by the Soviet Navy, and thus ensued large series construction of the WHISKEY Class (about 240 units built in nine years); additional classes were to be built in considerably greater numbers.

The death of Stalin, in early 1953, immediately unleashed a leadership crisis for the Soviet Union, which only ended with the complete assumption of power by Khrushchev. From then on, the Navy stood once again in the shadow of the Red Army; whose leadership Khrushchev had to thank for the elimination of his rivals Malenkov and Beria (after Stalin's death they formed a ruling troika, together with him). From then on, he set the tone in practical. With that, he committed himself to the Army, whose marshals unhesitatingly posed their demands. First and foremost, aerial weapons and missiles, because the Soviets regarded aircraft and missiles as the means to threaten an enemy with strategic nuclear weapons systems, after they had successfully detonated their own first hydrogen bomb in 1953. Such a buildup was only possible through an enormous employment of materiel and of necessity had to become a burden on other plans. The first to feel the impact was the Navy, to which Khrushchev was never especially attached. The Navy directly experienced for itself that which had already concerned the Army, whose leadership presumably recognized quite early that the amphibious threat which had been the basis (of defense planning) until then, was no longer real and had always been only a hypothesis. The result was a drastic cut in the current fleet construction program by about half of all programs. It was at this point that the numerous cruiser, destroyer and submarine new constructions were stopped and the hulls for the most part dismantled. On this matter, disagreements developed

with Admiral Kuznetsov, the then commander-in-chief of the Soviet Navy, ultimately leading to his removal. He was replaced by Sergei S. Gorshkov, who still occupies that position today, more than 25 years later. Under his auspices, the Soviet Navy became what it remains to this day, and therefore 1956 must be regarded as the "year of birth" of the modern Soviet Navy. /25

In that period a new type of threat to Soviet imperialist plans became apparent: the American carrier strike forces which had been incorporated shortly after the Korean War into the strategy of nuclear deterrence. During this period, Western leaders had shed their illusions and had to take into account the fact that Communist-ruled states would henceforth repeatedly resort to force and aggression, if this appeared useful in order to satisfy their geopolitical interests. With the then newly-developed carrier aircraft, it had become possible to strike with nuclear weapons deep into enemy territory. Thus they could reach numerous sensitive enemy targets from the sea. The carrier task groups themselves were so well protected by a multifaceted defense that it was next to impossible to approach them with conventional weapons and means.

This development had been recognized by the Soviet leadership, making it relatively easy to give up the construction program underway at the time and replace it with another adapted to the changed circumstances. At the time he was named commander-in-chief of the Soviet Navy, Gorshkov was probably already familiar with this new task. The problem of countering the carrier strike force now capable of penetrating deep into the interior was characterized by the fact that neither surface combatants nor submarines nor aircraft were capable of delivering their shells, torpedoes and bombs to the carrier strike force. Thus the Soviet Navy was compelled to find ways to deliver its weapons, primarily nuclear warheads, to their target from outside the enemy's perimeter of defense. This capability paved the way for the rapid development of missile systems which had already long since been introduced into the Soviet ground forces. At that time, too, missiles were no longer a novelty to the Navy; as early as the beginning of the '50s the Navy had begun to experiment with missiles, chiefly based on the first refinements of designs modeled after the German V-1. In view of the changed strategic situation at sea, it became imperative to develop a missile which could attack enemy ships at greater distances. These efforts were evidently accelerated after Gorshkov took office. At any rate, they resulted in the completion of the first such weapons system, the SCRUBBER (SS-N-1), at the beginning of the 1960s. At the same time, work was resumed on the abandoned destroyer, for which no other navy had anything comparable. In a relatively short time, submarines, too, were adapted to the anticarrier strategy using such new weapons systems. At first this was accomplished by modifying existing units, but later by building new ones with conventional as well as nuclear propulsion.

Weapon systems in the immediate coastal area, too, were adapted to the changed conditions once the Soviets were able to develop a relatively light antiship missile and suitable platforms. This was realized in the STYX (SS-N-2) missile and in the KOMAR and especially the OSA-Class guided-missile patrol boats, which were produced in great numbers. Thus the Soviet Navy became increasingly better equipped for the changed strategic naval situation. The high point then was the KYNDY-Class guided-missile cruiser, equipped with a considerably more effective antiship missile system (SS-N-3) and, for the first time, with an anti-aircraft missile system. The latter was intended to increase her survivability in highly dangerous operational areas.

Independent of this program conceived to counter carrier task forces and, thus, often designated in the Western literature as the "anticarrier program," there was movement within the Soviet Navy in another direction. While the Soviets openly displayed their first antiship guided-missile destroyer for all the world to see in the summer of 1961, they maintained strict silence concerning the other movement. This concerned the use of submarines as platforms for ballistic missiles. These efforts can be traced back to the year 1952, to a time when the Americans were first experimenting with cruise missiles on their submarines and, indeed, had not yet considered employment of ballistic missiles on their submarines. As early as 1955 the Soviets were able to successfully launch a modified SCUD missile from a surfaced ZULU-Class submarine. The second step in this direction had to be the realization of a least detectable (underwater) launch, and this required that submarines thus armed be driven by a propulsion system which required no oxygen. Nuclear propulsion promised to fulfill this need. To be sure, it took the Soviet Union longer than the U.S. to develop a nuclear propulsion plant suitable for submarines. For the Soviets the path took a detour, through the icebreaker LENIN. The latter, it has been only relatively recently learned, was built primarily to test the proposed reactors for future submarines and only secondarily had importance as a commercial venture. This procedure cost a few years time. Simultaneously, efforts to develop a submarine-launched ballistic missile continued. In 1959 the first ballistic missile weapon system developed specifically for the submarine, the SARK (SS-N-4), was tested, albeit with considerable delays, and shortly thereafter introduced into the fleet. Because nuclear-powered submarines were not yet available, the Soviets turned to the available, large ZULU-Class submarines and equipped several of this class each with two of the missiles. At about the same time, the Soviets built a new series of conventional submarines, the GOLF-Class, each armed with three such missiles. Finally, after the problems of submarine nuclear propulsion had been solved, the first such submarines were begun in 1958 and were operational by the early 1960s. This first generation of Soviet nuclear submarines already included a series of ballistic-missile platforms--the HOTEL Class.

These units had the same weapons complement as the GOLF Class, but had the advantages of nuclear propulsion.

From today's perspective it can be seen that these efforts represented Soviet attempts, begun in the early 1950s, to acquire a nuclear strategic potential as quickly as possible. While the Soviets had created a strategic bomber force early on along the lines of the American prototypes, the unfavorable geostrategic position of the Soviet Union compelled her to employ other strategic weapon platforms, in order to be able to deliver nuclear warheads to the enemy over distances beyond the range of aircraft. The submarine was thus brought into this strategy as a "delivery vehicle for delivery vehicles." The Americans reacted with construction, beginning in 1956, of their POLARIS submarine weapon system. The POLARIS submarines grew into a strike force far superior technologically and operationally to the Soviet missile submarines, which the Soviets had scarcely taken into account. This submarine posed, for the Soviet Union, a new and great danger to planned ventures, against which she had no promising defense. Soviet ASW warfare had hitherto been a neglected naval discipline, inasmuch as up to that point there had been no compelling reason to develop this capability due to the lack of a vital maritime commerce. Almost instantaneously, however, ASW warfare acquired a significance requiring extensive efforts and measures.

This led to a change in thinking and a complete reordering of naval construction. This was reflected in a new concept of naval armament referred to in the Western literature as the "Anti-POLARIS" program.

The West did not recognize the complete significance of this change in Soviet armament until the mid-60s. Among other things, outwardly this indicated the redesignation of the large units previously called "missile cruisers" to "large ASW ships," the visibly more powerful ASW weaponry and the inclusion of ASW helicopters on the larger combatants. When the MOSKVA-Class helicopter carriers made their appearance in the second half of the '60s, their true mission was at first misunderstood and misinterpreted. Only later did the West realize that these units were also a part of this program, or, more exactly, a part of this concept. The same is very likely true for the units of the KIEV Class, which are similarly "hermaphrodites" because of their ambiguous type characteristics. This design also likely fits into the framework of the "Anti-POLARIS" strategy.

Events during the Cuban crisis in the spring of 1962 showed the Soviet Union in a drastic fashion where the limits of her ambitions as a great power and a world power lie. At least from that time on it must have been clear in Moscow that Soviet objectives in the areas ruled by the great naval powers--which includes more than just the possession of warships--and that the means at hand were in no way sufficient to convincingly threaten the United States as the leading power of the West. These bitter experiences then led once again to a reorientation of the naval construction program, in which submarine development and construction were more heavily favored. At that time there appeared not only a second generation of Soviet nuclear submarines, but also the counterpart of the American POLARIS force: the 34 units of the YANKEE Class appearing in this period exactly reflected the American prototypes and are, like them, armed with 16 ballistic missiles of approximately the same range as the American POLARIS I. The succeeding developmental phases brought new, improved missiles and led to the construction of the DELTA series, numbering more than 30 units, equipped with missiles with a range of up to 4000 nm, which for the most part already have multiple warheads.

In this building period, however, the importance of ASW warfare was maintained: it was in fact even more strongly accentuated, in part. However, from a certain point in time one could no longer fail to notice that the Soviets had obviously set as their goal the exercise of a continuous presence on the world oceans and the use of the fleet as an instrument of foreign policy more than ever before. And in fact, the activity of the Soviet Navy has increased considerably on the major world oceans since the end of the '60s. The great naval exercises from 1970 on further underscore the pretensions of the Soviet naval command.

A new epoch was ushered in, in the early '70s. The planning stage goes back that far for the new ship classes appearing from 1980 on, led by the over 22,000-t KIROV, a nuclear-propelled cruiser with a remarkable arsenal of weapons. The particularly conspicuous thing about the generation of new Soviet ship construction, as it has grown to the present and continues to grow, is its significant relative growth. This includes those periods of the past in which the Soviet warship types were always below the norms of comparable foreign constructions--but not in terms of combat effectiveness. From this it becomes clear that everything added to the Soviet Navy since 1980--beginning with the monstrous KIROV, through the heavy destroyers of the SOVREMENNY and UDALOY Classes up to the KARA Class follow-ons, originating in the Black Sea--is designated for worldwide ocean deployment. This has been further underscored through the construction of large fleet replenishment vessels, as revealed in the BEREZINA, as well as in the building of a new fleet of landing ships, introduced by the IVAN ROGOV. In the process, the construction of submarines has not been neglected in any way,

but strengthened even more. The development of a new type of very fast attack submarines built predominantly of titanium (ALPHA Class) provided early proof for this. Now Soviet missile submarines are growing in Soviet shipyards, such as the TYPHOON Class, equipped with 20 long-range ballistic missiles (SS-N-20), and the OSCAR Class, which is the object of much attention because of its excessive volume. The OSCAR must be considered the underwater equivalent of the KIROV in that both are armed with the SS-N-19 missile.

As things now appear, the Soviet Union has set for herself the goal of construction of a "three-ocean navy"--for the Atlantic in any case, for the Pacific as well, and most recently for the Indian Ocean, the importance of which has risen precipitously in recent years. It is already apparent how strongly the Soviet Navy will be represented on the major seas of the world at the end of this decade: a full-fledged aircraft carrier--doubtless with nuclear propulsion--will belong to this fleet, as well as at least a second cruiser of the KIROV Class, four ASW carriers of the KIEV Class (whose third unit will shortly leave the Black Sea in operational status, while the fourth is expected for the mid-'80s), and three mini-KIROVs (the enlarged KARA follow-ons currently under construction in Nikolayev are so categorized). These will very likely be drawn together into battle groups and protected by the equally new UDALOY-Class large guided-missile destroyer and finally supported by a mobile, efficient logistic system. One may also have to reckon with an amphibious assault unit, the very beginnings of which are revealed in the landing ship (dock) IVAN ROGOV.

In addition to the clearly ocean-oriented fleet construction, the buildup of light forces for deployment in marginal seas continues. Generally, obsolete materiel is being replaced; in the construction of replacements, one repeatedly discerns the effort to raise combat efficiency through the use of the most advanced technology.

In the KIROV example alone, the Soviet Union has shown that she is ready to put up with expenditures of astro 1 magnitude without regard for the general welfare. Measured against the construction costs of Western warships, an expenditure must be reckoned with for the KIROV that would only be justified for a "genuine" aircraft carrier in the Western view, because from the point of view of total efficiency, such a carrier would still be manifestly superior to the KIROV. This superiority, however, seems to play a very subordinate role in a "noncapitalist" state such as the Soviet Union--if it plays a role at all--especially if the main concern (and the objective is unmistakable) is to extend one's own sphere of influence to the world oceans through an aggressive, enduring presence. Seas have not only a separating function, but also a connecting function, and for the coexistence of peoples their significance is not appreciated highly enough. The Soviet rulers, however, regard them more as "runways" on which they can open up those areas, to which they previously had no access, as spheres of influence. As has been emphasized in NATO leadership circles again and again, the scope and tempo of the naval buildup in recent years goes considerably beyond that which would be reasonably allocated for the defense interests of the Soviet Union, considering her very long sea frontiers.